[766 cont.] Then one tries to console the dead (angip'sngis) with prayer and sacrifices of meat and sour milk, which are laid on a cloth under a protective roof near some clothing and, in the case of female souls, trinkets, and begs for the recovery of the stricken person, who stands nearby and whose back is stroked for "deliverance" (azati).

When someone has drowned and his body has been buried, his soul is supposed to have remained in the water and must be fetched out. For this purpose they hang a leather shoulder-sack on a silk string over the stream in question, and men and women stand on the back singing and playing the harp to entice the soul into the sack. As soon as the soul has slipped in, a man jumps into the water and ties the sack shut, he then takes it to the grave and allows the soul to enter into its body through a hole.

[767] Religious beliefs and customs. Christianity is supposed to have been brought to Abkhazia, according to the Georgian chronicle of Vakhtang V, about 40 A.D., but apparently did not find favorable soil, since there are no reports of successful propagation until the time of the Byzantine occupation of the coastal cities. Emperor Justinian had a large church erected at Bitshvinta (pitzunda) where the Abkhaz Catholics and the Georgian governor then had their residence. At the end of the seventeenth century most of the Abkhaz were induced by the Tatars to take up Islam, and only the Samurakhan remained faithful to Christianity, but the many ruins of churches and monasteries are regarded by them as holy places to which they make pilgrimages and on which they take oaths. Also several customs may have a Christian origin: use of wax tapers and incense, colored Easter-eggs, respect for the sign of the cross, fasting, eating of pork, and the like. The Cherkess, in whose lands few remains of churches are to be found, gave up Christianity for Islam later than the Abkhaz; the Kabardin were converted to it toward the middle of the eighteenth century, and the others, under Turkish influence, toward the end of the eighteenth century. Both religions, however, have exerted as little influence as among the mountain Georgians, for the old indigenous beliefs and customs have never been given up.

The gods of the Abkhaz are very similar to those of the Osset (see pp. 86 f.). A supreme god (Antsar mz) is ruler over

[767 cont.]

776 good and bad. The Hammerers (Ašatsatšap'atsa) decide the fate of the newborn and write it on their foreheads (lakhintsara). As nature gods they worship the protector of cattle (Aĭt'ar), of goats (Džabran), of wild game (Ažvepša), of the earth (Adabna), of the rainbow (Atsakwa), and the protectress of the water (Dzlan dzahwas'), of the wind (P'šarn'a), of seeds (Dž'adž'a and Anap'anga), of dogs (Ališkantra), of bees (Ananagund), and others. Just like the Osset, they have a protector of raiders (Eirig-ātsnykh) or Tšugurukhnykh) and one of smiths (Šyošu). The latter two, which are called upon very frequently, may be of a manistic type, derived from the belief in souls, as may be the protective spirit of the hearth (Aša'ara), the mother-goddess (Anana'a), and the "outer ones" (adnqa) (see p. 22). The Abkhaz attribute to the god of thunder (cf. p. 87) the same power and abilities as the Osset do to the holy Elias, but he is in part confused with the incomprehensible highest god (see p. 61) and is endowed with his abilities, and therefore also the shape of the local supreme god (Anyba-nykha-dudrüp'š), whose home is supposed to be the
224 mountain Dudrüpsh at Lykhny. ---Hunters sacrifice a male goat
[782] or a ram to the god of game (Ažvepša) before the hunt, which begins after the vintage [768] and lasts until about the new year, so that he will grant them the desired prey from his herds. He gives them, however, only those animals that he and his daughter have already eaten and that he has restored to life by wrapping
[825] their bones in the skin after his meal. White animals are the herdsmen of Ažvepša and therefore must not be slain.

Evil souls, similar to the western European vampires,
776 tear the eyes, heart, liver, etc. out of the body and suck the milk from the cows. They have different powers and accordingly ride on frogs, mice, cats, or on foxes and wolves. Their chief (Roskipi) lives on the mountain Tabakona, where every year they must account for Mary's Assumption and must exhibit the plundered body-parts. For this reason the Abkhaz put up
● [788] crosses during fasts, carry lights on their heads, and on the previous night stay up and shoot and sing. The evil souls can at the same time stay among men and on the mountain Tabakona, since